

BLM Uncompahgre Field Office--Wild and Scenic River Process

# **Vegetation Values**

# Vegetation Values

- Q. Vegetation is everywhere, so what gives some vegetation special value?
  - A. Rare types including species or combinations of species (communities), rare age classes (e.g. ancient), or especially productive habitat.



# Vegetation Values

- Q. What is the importance of rare vegetation communities?
  - A. They may reflect rare habitats and likely shelter species we do not even know about.
  - A. They may serve as "canaries in the coal mine" which are important for indicating overall ecosystem health.
  - A. They are parts of the ecosystem---intelligent tinkering keeps all of the parts.
  - A. In degraded systems, they may be the last intact parts.

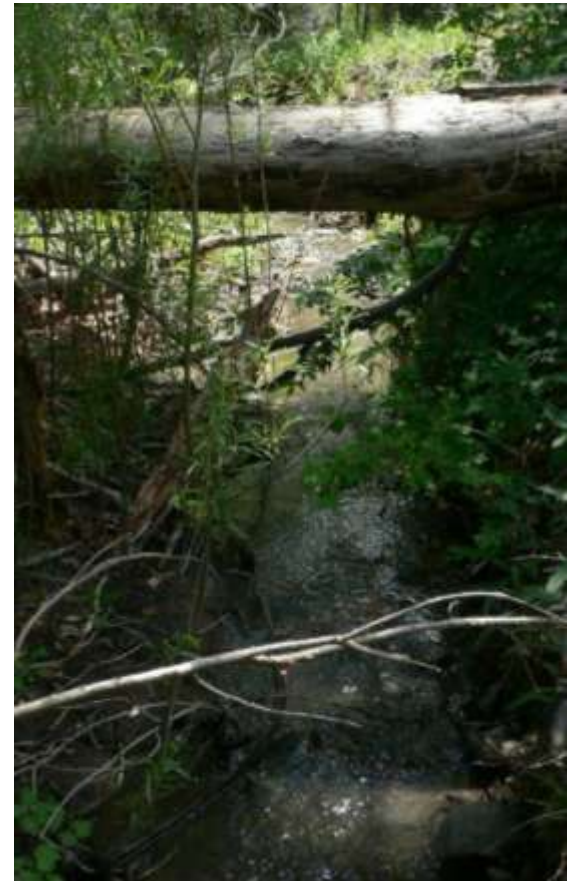
# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. What is an ORV?
  - A. Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) are unique, rare or exemplary, significant within a region, and river or stream-related.



# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. How did BLM decide which streams have vegetation ORVs?
- A. Stream segments were determined to have a vegetation ORV if BLM had documented records of the presence of unique, rare or exemplary riparian vegetation.





# The Vegetation ORV



- Q. How did BLM define unique, rare or exemplary riparian vegetation?
  - A. BLM used a ranking system developed by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program (CNHP). Rare and unique riparian vegetation was defined as having a rarity ranking of G1 or G2, and exemplary riparian vegetation was defined as having an Element Occurrence Ranking of A.

# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. How are G1, G2, and A ranks defined?
  - A. G1 means very vulnerable to worldwide disappearance or extinction with 5 or fewer known occurrences, while G2 is slightly less vulnerable with 6-20 known occurrences. "A rank" means an occurrence with excellent chance of surviving over the long term because of size, condition, and health of the surrounding landscape.



# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. Which G<sub>1</sub> and G<sub>2</sub> riparian vegetation types are documented in the Wild and Scenic Eligibility Report?

	Lower Gunnison	San Miguel	Upper Dolores	Lower Dolores
Fremont cottonwood/skunkbush sumac –G <sub>2</sub>	7	1	0	0
Narrowleaf cottonwood/strapleaf willow /silver buffaloberry-G <sub>1</sub>	3	0	0	1
Skunkbush sumac (sandbar willow)-G <sub>2</sub>	1	1	0	0
New Mexico privet riparian shrubland-G <sub>2</sub>	0	3	1	0
Boxelder-river birch –G <sub>2</sub>	0	0	5	0



# The Vegetation ORV



- Q. What are the A ranked vegetation types documented in the Eligibility Report?
  - A. They range from rare (G2) to common (G5), and include communities such as blue spruce-narrowleaf cottonwood-alder and sandbar willow.

	Lower Gunnison	San Miguel	Upper Dolores	Lower Dolores
A Ranked Riparian Communities	1	7	0	0

# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. If these types are so rare, why do there seem to be a lot of them around here?
  - A. What may appear common here can still be rare if does not occur elsewhere, making it globally unique. The Colorado Natural Heritage Program and other state Heritage Programs track occurrences and help us understand rarity at the national and global scale. As more information and inventories are done, we gain a better understanding of which communities truly are rare.

# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. How does a Wild and Scenic River designation help preserve vegetation ORVs?
- A. Riparian vegetation is strongly influenced by streamflow, particularly spring flooding in this region\*. When a designation helps to maintain the existing hydrograph, vegetation ORVs have a better chance of being sustained.



\* Friedman et al 2006. TRANSVERSE AND LONGITUDINAL VARIATION IN WOODY RIPARIAN VEGETATION ALONG A MONTANE RIVER. Western North American Naturalist 66(1)

# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. Won't instream flow protections adequately protect the existing hydrograph and vegetation ORVs?
- A. Instream flow protections would provide minimal levels of flows to protect fish. They will not protect flood flows needed for riparian ORVs.





# The Vegetation ORV

- Q. What other protections does Wild and Scenic Suitability provide for the Vegetation ORV?
- A. The quarter mile buffer would limit damage to Vegetation ORVs from some public land uses. The level of protection would depend on Wild, Scenic, or Recreational classification.





# The Vegetation ORV



- Q. Doesn't BLM already have protections for riparian values in existing plans and protected areas?
- A. Current riparian protections are not comprehensive. They include some restrictions on natural gas well locations, and some limitations to development in the San Miguel Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

# The Vegetation ORV



- Q. Aren't these values replaceable?
  - A. We don't know. But we know the cost of river restoration can exceed \$1,500 per acre, just to remove the weeds which come in once flows and vegetation are substantially altered. And we don't know how to successfully revegetate these areas, much less the cost of doing so.

# Happy Holidays!

- Wishing everybody a happy and healthy 2011!

